

KISSIMMEE RIVER

...restoring the river and floodplains



Pre-channelized
Kissimmee River

Public outcry spawns a restoration plan

Once twisting and turning from the Upper Chain of Lakes just below Orlando to Lake Okeechobee, the Kissimmee River shared its water with 50,000 acres of wetlands along the way. From 1962 to 1971, as part of a federal public works project, the river was carved into the C-38 canal, 30 feet deep and 56 miles long. Before completion, environmental impacts evoked public outcry, which sparked a strong restoration movement evolving into the Kissimmee River Restoration Project.

Channelized
Kissimmee River



With restoration under way, by 2008, numbers of largemouth bass and sunfish showed an increase from 38 percent (post-channelization) to 68 percent of the fish community in the Kissimmee River.



Popular sport fish are rebounding

The Kissimmee River greets anglers with greater opportunities as the ecosystem is being restored. Channelization of the river caused small fish as well as shrimp and other invertebrates to disappear along with their wetland habitat. Fisheries dwindled and game fish catches declined by half. Fish are now rebounding and are expected to benefit from restoration.



Reconnecting a river and its floodplains

By 2008, restoration construction backfilled 10 miles of the canal, recarved 2 miles of river channel and demolished a river spillway. This resulted in water flow to 18 miles of continuous river channel and the recovery of more than 6,300 acres of floodplains.



The black-necked stilt is one of eight shorebird species absent before restoration that has now returned to the river.



Wetland plants now thrive in the restored floodplains, including arrowhead, Carolina willow and buttonbush (left).

Returning natural river flow

Restoration of the Kissimmee River is eliminating human disruptions to natural river flow. In the restored areas, water now flows along the natural, original river channel and also "sheet flows" over the floodplain during higher flow periods. Continuous flow of water improves plant and animal habitats and water quality. During the drought of 2007, the restored river ecosystem adapted to extreme weather conditions more readily than the channelized river.



Pickerelweed is an emergent plant native to the historic river.



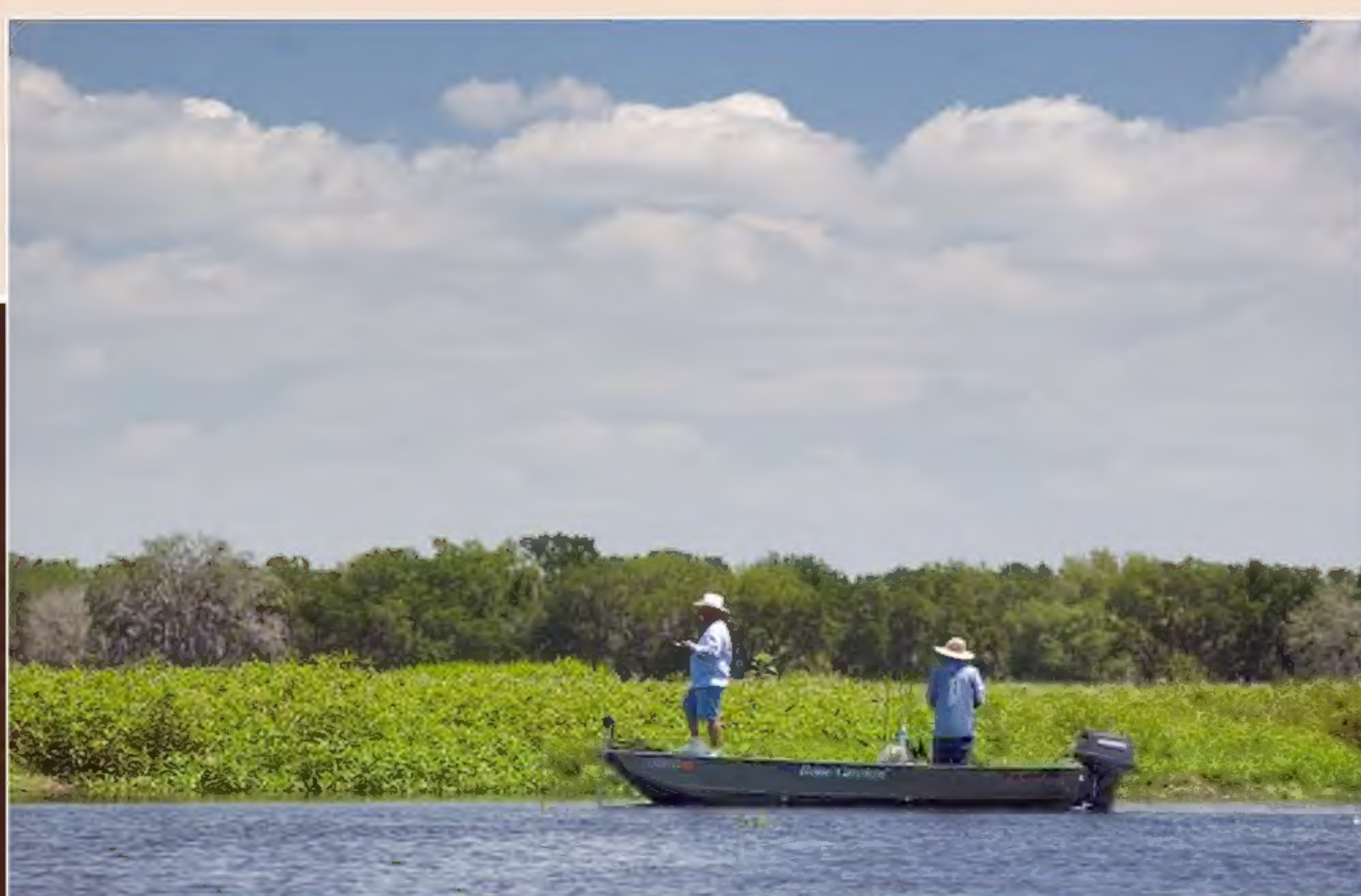
New habitat is created

In the restored river channel, organic deposits on the river bottom decreased by 71 percent, which also reestablished sand bars, restoring habitat for invertebrates and shorebirds. More than 320 fish and wildlife species will benefit from Kissimmee River restoration, including endangered species like the wood stork.



All things large and small are thriving

Channelization of the Kissimmee River disrupted the region's food chain. Now, aquatic invertebrate communities are more characteristic of those found in a free-flowing river. These invertebrates, such as caddisflies and mayflies (left) are a vital food source for almost all fish species in the Kissimmee River.



The Kissimmee River is once again a mecca for boaters and anglers as restoration of the ecosystem moves forward.



Rebuild it and they will come

The Kissimmee River Restoration Project will restore more than 12,000 acres of wetlands and water flow to approximately 40 continuous miles of river channel. After being absent for 40 years, ducks are once again making the river home. They include the American widgeon, northern pintail, northern shoveler, ring-necked duck and black-bellied whistling duck (above). Additionally, long-legged wading birds, including white ibis, great egret, snowy egret and little blue heron, have more than tripled in the floodplain region and restored river.